



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**ALBANIA**

## FACT SHEET

# Faith-Based Initiative



*Religious leaders from the Muslim, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Catholic communities are working together to promote development in Albania.*

## PROJECTS

- **Fostering Religious Harmony in Albania**  
(April 2004- Dec. 2006)

## CURRENT SITUATION

After decades of compulsory atheism under Communism, Albania remains a largely secular country, though most of its citizens identify with one of four main religious denominations. Two-thirds of the population is made up of self-described Muslims, divided into moderate Sunnis and Bektashi, a liberal form of Shi'a Sufism. An estimated 20-25 percent is Albanian Orthodox; around 10 percent are Roman Catholics.

Albania's democracy has created institutions supportive of religious freedom while reinforcing longstanding norms of interfaith tolerance. The country's 1998 Constitution provides for freedom of worship, treats all faiths as legal equals, while Albanian law recognizes both Christian and Muslim holidays. Culturally, interfaith marriage is common and religious leaders publicly express their desire to strengthen interfaith cooperation.

Albania's historical pattern of peaceful coexistence among religions has thus mostly reasserted itself in the post-communist era. However, the revival of religious practice under democracy has brought societal changes that carry repercussions for inter-religious relations. Faith-based institutions have grown in influence; religious identity has become stronger and more pervasive. Albanian ties with religious organizations outside the country have also solidified, bringing in new influences and new frictions to interfaith relations.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

An integral part of USAID's civil society support, the Fostering Religious Harmony in Albania project seeks to cultivate understanding and dialogue among religious groups, reinforcing Albania's tradition of tolerance and preventing tensions that beset other multi-religious countries undergoing democratization.

## PROGRAM FOCUS

- Help religious leaders to work with other groups towards common goals;
- Organize public dialogue and raise awareness on religious tolerance;
- Enhance the skills and tools of the religious leaders to improve dialogue within the community by reducing conflicts, fractionalization and radicalization.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Fostering Religious Harmony project seeks to underpin the peaceful coexistence and understanding among peoples of different faiths, reducing tensions within and among religious groups that might lead to societal conflict.

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*Workshop facilitator, Dr. Edmund Rapti, Professor of Psychology at the department of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana, leads a discussion on volunteerism at the Inter-Faith Summer Camp. The summer camp brought together Albanian youths from various religious faiths to discuss social science topics that participants can apply within and between their religious communities.*

USAID's training workshops help religious leaders and members of their communities hone their conflict management skills to allow them to interact better with other religious groups. Our training and assistance are intended to help religious organizations design and implement development projects that benefit entire communities regardless of faith.

The project also helps media and opinion leaders counter the arguments of intolerance that run contrary to values embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Through various media, such as public forums, the project helps citizens articulate the problems they are facing and work towards a common solution.

## SUCCESSES

- USAID sponsored training for more than 100 participants on various aspects of community development and project management so that they have the skills to engage in tangible interfaith development projects;
- With USAID funding, nearly 80 participants of different faiths were trained to act as conflict mediators within their religious communities;
- A baseline survey was conducted which was designed to establish the parameters to measure the impact of the project;
- USAID sponsored a televised interfaith discussion and began preparation on a documentary film promoting interfaith tolerance;
- USAID sponsored the interfaith summer camp in two one-week sessions in July 2005. This summer camp offered a unique opportunity for 130 youths of different faiths to share experience, learn about other faiths and share common ideas and concerns.
- USAID sponsored the participation of three young people from various religious communities to participate in the International Summer School on Religion and Public Life (ISSRPL) held this year in Jerusalem.

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